

Contributed

"WILL IT EVER BE A CHURCH?"

On a recent visit to Lynchburg, Va., to preach for the people of Bethesda (now a part of the First Presbyterian Church), the above question was asked the writer by an old esteemed friend. The question by my friend, under the conditions, instantly let loose a flood of tender and conflicting memories. Bethesda of to-day is the result of a work begun perhaps fifty years ago, during the early part of the pastorate of Rev. W. T. Hall, D.D., or perhaps before some workers of the old First Church took up a mission work in the eastern part of the town on the lower basin and built what was known as Fishing Creek Chapel. Dr. Hall preached there as he found opportunity, and Rev. P. K. Julien, Rev. John Crews and Rev. Tazewell McCorkle, all pastors of the Third Presbyterian Church, had regular stated appointments there. John Kinnier, a most consecrated elder and clerk of the session of the First Church, taught Sunday-school there and had as regular helpers such men as John Marshall, now gone to his reward, and other godly men and women, who served long and faithfully. Conditions, chiefly the buying of nearly all adjacent property by colored people, made it imperative that the work be moved. A lot was purchased on White Rock Hill, adjacent to and in reach of the people who had been served by the old Fishing Creek Mission. In addition the nucleus for a church in a growing suburb was established. F. M. Threadgill, of sainted memory, my best earthly friend, was the head and heart of this movement. He identified himself with the people. We reached out in Campbell county and built Jehovah-Jireh. The result was Bethesda Church as a separate institution, with its own officers and work. With two good, modest buildings and with school buildings in each church yard, and with a membership of more than 100, this church was served by pastors as follows: Rev. A. S. Rachal, Rev. W. C. Underwood, Rev. S. G. Hut-ton and Rev. A. N. Perryman, and supplied for awhile by Rev. S. Tilden Scherer. In the meantime, through misfortune and death, Bethesda had, like myself, lost its best friend, and to-day Bethesda is what old Fishing Creek Chapel was forty years ago—a mission of the First Church. To-day the Methodists have Trinity and the Baptists have Franklin Street, each separate, vigorous churches, made up largely of the very same class of people, many of them next-door neighbors to our Bethesda members. Yet the Presbyterians were at work for years at Fishing Creek and for a short while at Bethesda while the very ground on which our sister churches are now built and thriving was as yet back lots and grazing lots for cattle. Bethesda has her record, and it is one not to be ashamed of, but rather

to be proud of. She has some as good people as are to be found anywhere. Why should our Methodist and Baptist brethren succeed where we have apparently failed? Let me answer my friend's question: Yes, Bethesda will become a church—a living, vitalizing power for God—when contingent and adjacent Presbyterians catch something of the sainted spirit of Francis Marion Threadgill, who, like Ruth of old, will say to those worthy poor people, "Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God"; when our Presbyterian people shall become ashamed of the living example of our sister churches. If there is any going across the town it is leaving the strong to help the weak. A score of members could leave the stronger Presbyterian churches without materially weakening them but they would be all sufficient to make the weak strong. Brethren, let this be done everywhere in the spirit of the Gospel. Let us stop this mission business; no one wants to join a mission. I do not mean that the church shall do less mission work, but more, and do it more efficiently. Let no Presbyterian church be disbanded and abandoned. It is not money we need so much as head, heart and body in the work. When this is given it will surely become a church.

A. J. Ponton.

Chatham, Va., September 15, 1909.

THE PRAYER MEETING.

A recent editorial in the Presbyterian of the South on this subject contained several valuable suggestions, all of which are worth trying; but this writer interposes another. It is just as true as regards adults as it is of children that "variety is the spice of life." Try these suggestions, but do not fasten on to any one to be continually followed.

There is enchantment about the unexpected which will do much to enliven the prayer meeting. A long experience in attending these services enforces the belief that it is "the sameness of form, of lecture, of singing and of prayers that is the cause of the lowness of this, the so-called pulse of the church. Men worried by business, and women worn down by family cares can not be aroused to a lively interest in a service that is but a minimized Sunday service, with a substitute song service. This is not putting it too strongly, as any one may test by securing honest expression from that "faithful few" who so regularly attend for conscience sake. Bread is the staff of life, but everybody desires variety even in that. Spasmodic efforts, with special song services and announced subjects, often run well for a time; but monotony generally follows and interest dies. Now, a criticism without a proposed improvement is worthless; so it is suggested that the prayer meeting be made more colloquial, having no set program. But let each meeting bring up the subject for the next, the pastor being only the leader. Make the whole a religious social study of God's Word, interspersed with prayers and hymns, but

with no set stages or regular times. The leader should be so filled with a desire to help and be helped that his interest will prove infectious, and those who catch the infection will tell others, and thus the meetings will become attractive and adhesive as well as permeative.

FOREIGN MISSIONS IN OCTOBER.

Dear Friends:

We are glad that in coming before you with our October appeal we are able to begin this year, as we did last, with a note of thanksgiving.

Notwithstanding a large decrease in legacies, our contributions for the first five months of fiscal year show an increase over those for the corresponding months of last year of \$14,097.43. While this increase is not so large as we hoped it might be, in view of the ever-increasing needs of our ever-expanding work, we are encouraged to believe that this year, as last, our largest gain will be in the months following our October collection.

We also have reason to be grateful for the news that comes from all our friends of the unprecedented blessing of God upon our work. The first graduating class of the boys' school recently established at Lavras, Brazil, sends three fine boys to the seminary at Campinas this year, and thus begins to fulfill the purpose of its existence in supplying the Brazilian Church with a well-trained native ministry. The native Church in Mexico is aroused and is co-operating vigorously in the effort to supply a similar need for that field.

Our Church at Cardenas, Cuba, has entered the Forward Movement, subscribing for one \$50 share in the work in Africa. Two brilliant young men from that Church, one of whom was valedictorian of his class at Westminster College, returned this summer to take up the work of preaching the Gospel at home. An elder of the Church at Place-tas, ordained in the month of May, was a delegate to our Missionary Conference at Montreal, and made an appeal for his country which deeply moved the hearts of all his hearers.

Mr. DeYampert writes from Africa that, notwithstanding the troubles in that field, the schools, catechumen classes and daily services keep up a full attendance, "and the good work moves on as ever."

Mr. Myers writes us from Japan that "every missionary in active evangelistic work can testify that there is less prejudice, less opposition and more openness to the Gospel today than ever before in the history of the country."

The churches in Korea and China are experiencing a great spiritual awakening. The revival which came in answer to the prayers of the Welsh missionaries in India, when they heard of the wonderful work of God in their home land, passed over to Korea and thence to Manchuria and is now passing from church to church throughout China. One fruit of this revival has been an enthusiastic evangelistic fervor in the native